

REPORT OF THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT

The statistics generated by the Alton Planning Department during FY 2008 were reflective of an overall development downtrend both regionally and nationwide. Although Alton remains one of the most desired residential locations in the state, the runaway subdivision development experience that began in the early 2000's has significantly slowed. Ironically, this current reduction in application submittals has allowed the department time to become more involved in actual long-range planning along with its regulatory rule in processing land use applications.

The Planning Board saw only five new subdivision applications approved during 2008. Of those applications submitted, a net gain of 27 lots resulted. During 2007, 14 subdivision applications were submitted with 11 being approved and 45 new lots subsequently resulting; a decrease of 60 percent from the previous year, 2006. Lot Line Adjustments increased from 10 in 2007 to 12 in 2008 (along with one Voluntary Lot Merger) and the incidence of Site Plan review was almost 30 percent higher this past year than in 2007.

In July, five rental units located on Mount Major Highway received approval for condominium conversion and after several months of meetings, a proposed elderly housing development on NH Route 140 received conditional approval to construct 52 units.

Alton's Zoning Board of Adjustment dealt with 16 new applications in 2008 including seven for Special Exception, five for Area Variance and one for Administrative Appeal. Two denials were issued in the categories of Area Variance and Special Exception, while a total of three applications were withdrawn by the applicants.

During the latter part of 2007 and into early 2008, the Zoning Board of Adjustment dealt with multiple hearings and intense public scrutiny surrounding the application for a Special Exception to allow the building of a motocross park along NH Route 29 south. While ultimately, the application did not garner approval for a special exception, the process nonetheless served to bring a high level of visibility to zone-appropriate land use issues in Alton.

While the numbers of actual applications to the Planning Board and ZBA were statistically down in 2008, the boards met a significant amount of times outside their regularly scheduled monthly meetings to upgrade zoning regulations and participate in special projects. Members of these boards met on upgrading their bylaws, reviewing criteria for Class VI roads, and creating fire protection requirements for new subdivisions and other issues of concern.

The Planning Board participated in a Scenic Resources Inventory with Lakes Region Planning Commission and consultant Tom Kokx to identify and locate valuable scenic

resources within the town's boundaries. This effort went a long way towards providing valuable information for any future zoning redelineation.

Peter Julia, P.E., of Farmhouse Land Development LLC in Plymouth and SFC Engineering Partnership of Manchester were selected to represent the Town's interest in planning and zoning board compliance reviews after a lengthy search and review process. Mr. Julia's firm has recently completed a comprehensive review of Alton's municipal road system with assistance by the Alton Planning Department at the request of the Board of Selectmen. This effort was put forth in order to prioritize repair and reconstruction efforts by the Highway Department in a comprehensive effort to upgrade the overall town road infrastructure over time.

In July 2008, I completed my first year of service to the Town, becoming familiar with the lay of the land and issues of concern to Alton. Future projects, such as the upgrade of the Alton Traffic Circle, continued efforts to expand sidewalks and pedestrian amenities and interaction with local historic and civic groups, along with participation in regional, grassroots energy conservation efforts will keep things lively in the planning office through the coming year.

Respectfully submitted

Sharon Penney, Town Planner